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## **What School Leadership Texts Teach:**

### ***An Analysis of Leading Volumes***

### ***Used in Principal Preparation***

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***Abstract***

*Little scholarly attention has been paid to what aspiring principal are actually reading in the preparation courses or whether the texts prepare them for the demands of accountable management. We examine eleven of the thirteen most commonly assigned educational administration texts in a sample of 210 principal preparation syllabi. In the texts studied, of thirteen terms tracked, “performance” and/or “achievement” were the most commonly used, appearing 44.3 times per 100 pages of text. Meanwhile, the terms “efficiency,” “accountability,” and “termination/dismissal” were mentioned less than six times per 100 pages. The texts generally encourage the use of data but are more skeptical when it comes to using results to make tough management decisions. Three possible approaches to enhancing the content of preparation are proposed: authors broadening discussion in existing texts, publishers issuing new texts, or faculty taking steps to diversify their assigned readings.*

## **Introduction**

In an era of accountability and decentralization, in which school leaders are expected to demonstrate bottom-line results and use data to drive decisions, the skill and knowledge of principals matters more than ever. School improvement rests to an unprecedented degree on the quality of school leadership, which elevates the importance of how we train and teach aspiring principals.

An array of scholars has asked whether traditional approaches to preparing and licensing principals are sufficient for this changing world (Elmore 2000; Fordham Foundation 2003; Hess 2003; Murphy 2001; Tucker 2003). Principals themselves are among the first to suggest that they might be more effectively prepared, with just 4% of reporting that graduate school studies did more to prepare them for their position than on-the-job experiences or guidance from colleagues. In fact, 67% of principals asserted that “typical leadership programs in graduate schools of education are out of touch with the realities of what it takes to run today’s school districts” (Farkas et al. 2003: 39).

Providers of principal preparation have advocated a variety of new approaches. Leaders of the University Council for Education Administration have asserted that “in order to move forward—in order to build programs that support leadership for learning—we must rethink and revise our practice in several areas” (Young and Kochan 2004: 121). Reforms have included modified education school programs, new state-run principal academies, and changes in state licensure statutes (Jackson & Kelley 2002; Hale & Moorman 2002; SREB 2003). Though the substance of these reforms is a matter of debate (Hess & Kelly 2005a), changes in delivery, content, and course sequencing are being implemented.

Amidst this activity, however, little scholarly attention has been paid to the content of what principals actually read and study in the course of their studies. What material are programs teaching? Are principals being prepared for the challenges they will face? This study asks: What are candidates reading in the core courses that constitute principal preparation at established principal preparation programs? If one believes that the content learned in a course of studies matters, as we do, the question of what candidates are reading in the course of their preparation is an important one.

Three questions guided this study. The first two address the degree to which administrative preparation texts are preparing principals for this new world of school leadership. First, we were interested in the degree to which the texts emphasize performance, achievement, and accountability rather than inputs. Much of the recent research on school leadership highlights the importance of monitoring and reporting student achievement and of effective data management in school improvement. For instance, a 2003 review of the research on principal effectiveness by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) emphasized the importance of “monitoring student progress and reporting findings” and “use of student data for program improvement” (Cotton 2003: 38-39).

Second, we examined the degree to which texts cover important management skills like the evaluation of personnel, the use of incentives, and removing ineffective educators. The new pressures to improve school performance, as well as the concrete requirements of No Child Left Behind’s Highly Qualified Teacher provision, highlight the importance of effective personnel management. Though this is a sensitive area, a 2004 ASCD primer points out that accountable management requires “the identification

and documentation of inadequate performance and, ultimately, the reassignment or removal of educators and leaders who fail to meet... standards” (Reeves 2004: 86).

The third, more minor, question deals with the oft-voiced critique that schools of education promote progressive or “politically correct” values. Critics have alleged that education school faculty frequently aim to “teach a particular ideology—that traditional knowledge is repressive by its very nature” (Steiner & Rozen 2004: 142). The last part of this study briefly explores how prevalent politically correct material is in principal preparation texts.

In order to examine these three questions, we looked at the attention that widely assigned texts pay to an array of management and leadership concepts deemed critical in the new educational environment. Concepts studied include accountability, personnel management, data, efficiency, and school culture. Such topics obviously do not cover the full spectrum of skills an aspiring principal would ideally master. Moreover, this list is heavier on management skills and lighter on some elements of “instructional leadership” than some experts would prefer. Our interest here, however, is primarily in the degree to which principals are being taught the kinds of management skills increasingly relevant to the evolving educational environment. We also investigate how particular concepts are treated, specifically whether various notions tend to be discussed in a dispassionate, positive, or negative light. Finally, the study considers the conservative critique of education schools by examining whether these frequently used texts give pride of place to notions like “multiculturalism” or “diversity.”

Because there exists no systematic analysis of what principals are reading in preparation courses, we cannot sensibly debate whether candidates are being adequately

trained to lead a 21<sup>st</sup> century school. Absent such data, debates about how we should change principal preparation or about the importance of preparation and licensure rest more on faith than fact.

### **Existing Research**

Discussion regarding principal preparation tends to focus on two questions: what does one need to know to be an effective school leader and what are existing training programs actually teaching? Here we focus on the second question, which has been the subject of little systematic research. Educational administration scholars have termed the body of research on administrator preparation “scant” (Lashway 2003). The existing research on administrator preparation—especially with regard to the texts used—consists primarily of essays or anecdotal examination of selected cases.<sup>1</sup>

The most recent look at educational administration textbooks is Thomas Glass’s (2004) survey of the profession’s history by examining fourteen of the most popular texts of the past twenty years. Glass reviews 14 “general” textbooks from the 1985-2000 period (one of which is included in the present study) and anecdotally characterizes the amount of time they spend on theory and practice. While providing an insightful picture of the evolution of the field of educational administration, the analysis does not seek to systematically examine how these textbooks treat the different skills and knowledge thought to be crucial to the principalship. Glass charts the transformation of educational administration from its beginnings as an offshoot of the scientific management movement through the specialization that characterizes administrator preparation today. He points out that the “general textbook” has fallen out of favor in educational administration and

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<sup>1</sup> A 2004 review of the literature found that just 81 empirical studies on any facet of administrator preparation were published in academic journals of any kind and 19 examined any issue relating to the curriculum of administrator preparation (Murphy and Vriesenga 2004)

that the most recent generation of textbooks are typically more specialized and shorter than their predecessors, while offering a blend of theory, practice, and research.

Earlier efforts to examine the most popular educational administration readings include Fero's (1991) survey of recommended reading according to 275 educational administration department chairs. The study found very little consistency across respondents, but did identify 22 titles that were recommended for educational administration students. Again, the analysis did not include an examination of the content of the recommended texts.

Other recent studies of administrator preparation textbooks have looked at particular skills and content areas, but most have focused on one facet of administrator preparation. Lee (1998) conducted a content analysis of public administration textbooks and found that the subject of public relations was being reintroduced to the books after a long absence. White and Daniel (1999) looked at the various approaches to instructional supervision in 12 supervision textbooks and found that evaluation-based theory was used more often than clinical theory. English (2002) and Thrupp (2003) have critiqued the inclusion of concepts such as problem-solving techniques and allusions to the work of Stephen R. Covey in educational administration books, but neither systematically examined how often these concepts appear in the most popular books. Ranis (2003) examined how preparation programs can promote research literacy in school leadership in part by looking at three popular educational research texts. The study collected data on how many chapters and pages discussed the general field of educational research and found that the research texts included concrete examples of existing educational research,

that quantitative methods outweighed qualitative ones, and that all of them spent one quarter to one third of their time on the elements of research design.

In short, little is known about what principal candidates are asked to read in their preparation courses and the actual content of those readings. Only a handful of existing studies discuss the texts used in administrator preparation, and none of them represent systematic and comprehensive looks at the books commonly assigned in a broad swath of programs. Moreover, the present study is unique in that no prior effort has sought to assess how frequently key management concepts were addressed in the texts or how those concepts were depicted.<sup>2</sup>

## Methods

We examine 11 of the 13 most frequently assigned texts, based on an analysis of 210 core course syllabi collected from a structured sample of 31 principal preparation programs (Hess & Kelly 2005b). Data collection, coding, and analysis took place between February and December 2004.

In early 2004, The US Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) listed 496 administrator preparation programs in the United States. The 31 programs studied included 13 of the nation's top 20 educational administration programs (as reported by *U.S. News and World Report* in 2004), 11 of the 20 largest programs (as reported by the US Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System in 2003), and seven other, more "typical" programs. Over the course of eight months, by contacting faculty at each institution at least eight times, the researchers collected between four and 13 "core" course syllabi

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<sup>2</sup> Similar studies have been conducted in other fields, including knowledge management in MBA texts, ethics content in accounting books, and research methods in psychology primers (Stephens and O'Hara 1998; Jackson et. al, 2001; Bracken and Urbancic 1999).



amenable to systematic coding from these programs. Ultimately, the analysis included 84 syllabi from the elite programs, 78 from the largest programs, and 48 from the more “typical” programs.

The 210 syllabi produced a total of 1,851 readings. This total included books, journal articles, edited volume chapters, newspaper articles, and law cases. Only “required readings” were included in the sample; “recommended readings,” “suggested readings,” or “supplemental readings” were excluded.<sup>3</sup> The present analysis focused only upon assigned books—not upon other kinds of readings. Forty-three percent of the assigned readings from the sample were books (or sections of books).

Striking is the lack of consistency with regard to which readings are assigned. Even the most frequently assigned title appeared only 23 times out of 1,851 readings.<sup>4</sup> The results reflect the specialization that has characterized educational administration over the last decade, with texts on particular topics like school law, school finance, human resource administration, or organizational behavior constituting the majority of assigned texts. As educational leadership expert Tom Glass (2004: 7) has pointed out, the decline of general education administration scholars has “resulted in a plethora of specialized textbooks featuring a narrow focus on just one area of school administration.”

The selection of books for analysis was straightforward. Seventeen volumes were assigned at least four times. Three of these titles were school law textbooks that focused upon case law and did not address school management, leadership, or administration.

Similarly, while Jonathan Kozol’s *Savage Inequalities* was assigned four times, the

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<sup>3</sup> For books that have been reissued, any edition of a particular book was counted as one observation of that single title. Therefore, totals for each title may include observations of multiple editions.

<sup>4</sup> This result is consistent with an earlier effort to identify the top ten educational administration textbooks. A survey of 275 department chairs revealed very little agreement among education administration scholars as to the most important titles (Fero 1991).

volume was omitted because the text does not address questions of school management, leadership, or administration. Of the remaining 13 volumes, we examined all seven of the volumes that were assigned more than four times. We also randomly selected for study four of the six texts assigned four times.

The books we examined are displayed in table 1. The 11 texts were sorted into three categories for purposes of reporting results: specialized textbooks, general textbooks, and foundational texts. We defined a text as “specialized” if it deals with one particular area of educational administration, like human resource administration, school and community relations, or teacher evaluation. General textbooks attempt to cover the many different facets of a principal’s job in one volume. Foundational texts do not focus on concrete skills and knowledge per se, instead focusing on the philosophy of educational administration.

**[See Table 1]**

Some scholars and practitioners may argue that the titles listed above are not a representative sample of the literature on educational administration. While such observations are reasonable, the fact remains that these are the volumes that were most commonly assigned in core courses in a national cross-section of preparation programs. These books reflect what professors are actually asking their students to read. If students are reading texts with particular emphases or areas of focus, this study will merely reflect that.

## Coding

We did not assess the narrative style, research base, or factual accuracy of texts. Rather, we examined how frequently and in what context these texts addressed a particular set of key concepts. The set of topics ranges from accountability and efficiency to values and diversity. Coding sought to quantify how often and in what context a selected set of important leadership competencies are referenced. In addition, in light of persistent critiques that rely more upon anecdote than systematic evidence, the researchers aimed to examine the validity of one of the most common attacks on education schools: that they spend much of their time teaching ideologically loaded, politically correct concepts like diversity, multiculturalism, and social justice.

The initial round of coding entailed a raw word count designed to determine the frequency with which various topics are addressed in the most commonly read preparation texts. The following terms were tabulated: “resources,” “accountability,” “data,” “efficiency,” “compensation,” “termination/dismissal,” “evaluation,” “performance” and “achievement,” “culture,” “diversity,” “multiculturalism,” and “values.”

In the second round of coding, we selected out a subset of these important concepts in order to analyze the context in which each topic was broached. The following topics were selected for closer scrutiny: accountability, data, efficiency, termination/dismissal, and resources. In general, the researchers examined each mention of each concept to determine whether the topic was discussed negatively, neutrally, positively, or in a positive fashion accompanied by guidance on how to use the concept as

a management tool.<sup>5</sup> This was based both on the specific sentence in which the term was mentioned and in the context of the paragraph in which it was discussed.

For instance, when accountability is described as leading to “more formalization, more centralization, [and] less professionalization,” (Hoy & Miskel 2005: 113) we coded this as a negative mention of accountability. When authors alluded to a term without necessarily highlighting its importance or offering prescriptions, it was coded as neutral. A statement like, “Successful principals also focused teaching and learning on the success for all students through . . . use of data” (Marsh 2000: 141) from the *Jossey-Bass Reader* was coded as a “positive” mention of data that did not give instructions on how best to implement the concept in question. Finally, positive mentions that included advice or prescriptions on how best to use a key concept included statements like, “If the intent were to reach certain objectives at the lowest possible cost, then a budget can also serve as an instrument for pursuing efficiency” (Odden & Picus 2004: 251).

## Findings

[See Table 2]

Table 2 illustrates the frequency with which the nine selected terms were discussed across the 11 volumes’ 3,451 pages. These summary figures provide a sense of the relative import attached to the texts most commonly assigned in a national cross-section of preparation courses. “Performance” and/or “achievement” were the most commonly cited terms, appearing 44.3 times per 100 pages. The next most commonly mentioned terms were “evaluation,” at 37.9 times per 100 pages, and “culture,” at 28.8. Mentioned least frequently were the terms “efficiency,” “accountability,” and

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<sup>5</sup> In the case of “resources,” the three categories were “referenced as low or not sufficient,” “explanation as to how best to allocate,” or “neutral/descriptive.”

“termination” or dismissal,” all of which were mentioned fewer than six times per 100 pages.

The texts appear to reflect the current focus on school performance and outcomes rather than inputs and resources. Across all three categories of texts, authors devoted significantly more attention to “achievement” and “performance” than to “resources.” The general and specialized texts also discuss “evaluation” at least twice as often as they discuss questions of resources and mention “data” more frequently than resources, while the foundational texts discuss resources more frequently than either data or evaluation. The terms “accountability” and “efficiency” are largely absent, though they receive somewhat more attention in the general texts than in the more specialized or the foundational volumes.

These aggregate figures, however, obscure the variation that was evident across the three different categories of texts. The foundational texts, in particular, are characterized by a relative inattention to many elements of management and an emphasis on softer qualities, particularly culture. In the foundational texts, accountability and efficiency together are only mentioned about five times per 100 pages, or about one-half as often as they mention resources and less than one-fourteenth as often as culture.

“Culture” is unrivaled in the attention it receives among the foundational texts and receives significant attention among the general texts, but is rarely mentioned in the specialized texts. The preponderance of culture among the foundational texts, however, is due largely due to the Deal and Peterson volume, *Shaping School Culture: The Heart of School Leadership*, which mention “culture” 273 times in just 142 pages—or nearly twice per page. Peterson and Deal emphasize school culture as being as important in

running an effective school as school management: “Too often, the technical side of leadership eclipses available time and willingness for its much-needed cultural aspects. As a result schools become sterile, incapable of touching the hearts of students and teachers” (Peterson & Deal, 99). Even when this title is removed from the foundational sample, however, culture still appears about 35 times every 100 pages, or about 7 times more often than it does in the specialized texts, and the tone in which culture is discussed often mirrors that of Peterson and Deal. As Michael Fullan (1997) points out, “We know that professional cultures, with their openness to new ideas, their focus on what and how students are learning, their giving and receiving help, are strongly related to success in continuous improvement” (30).

The topics that receive the least amount of attention across the three categories are those that deal with thorny personnel management issues like compensation and termination or dismissal. Again, there is also a great deal of variation between the three categories. Discussions of termination are almost non-existent in general and foundational texts, occurring less than once per 100 pages. Meanwhile, in specialized texts, termination comes up almost seven times every 100 pages. However, this disparity is almost entirely due to the inclusion among the specialized texts of the Rebores volume on human resources administration. Indeed, if Rebores is removed, the issue of termination is almost uniformly absent in the texts analyzed. This lack of attention to termination may be natural given the existing confines of public school management; firing a teacher is extremely difficult and expensive to carry out. Nonetheless, this inattention may leave new principals unable to take advantage of new opportunities in personnel management.

The data are similar for discussions of compensation, with general texts discussing compensation only 4.3 times every 100 pages and foundation texts less than once per 100 pages, while the specialized texts discuss it 33 times per 100 pages. Again, this is largely due to the inclusion of Rebores.

### **How Do Texts Discuss Accountability?**

While the raw word count data do show how prominently various concepts are addressed, these numbers do not tell the whole story. Another question is the context and tone in which the texts discuss said topic.

Table 3 reveals the context and tone of accountability discussions in the three text categories. Given its prominence in educational governance today, the lack of attention it received in Table 1 was surprising. Specialized textbooks are generally the least overtly negative or skeptical about accountability. Accountability was mentioned only about five times per 100 pages of text. Of those mentions, about 57% were neutral, 20% were positive in some fashion, and 23% were negative or hostile. In other words, readers only encountered accountability rarely and, when they did, 80% of the discussion was neutral or skeptical. Readers only encountered one page out of a 100 that included a positive mention of accountability.

### **[See Table 3]**

The skeptical references of accountability often revealed concern about its effect on teachers and schools. For example, Hoy and Miskel (2005: 101) see the push for increased accountability as “countervailing forces for increased centralization” that have “already muted” the movement toward a more decentralized, professional, and

autonomous system. Those rare positive references typically emphasized that accountability was a necessary component of school leadership, with texts promoting accountability and providing guidance on using it as a leadership tool less than once per 1,000 pages. Rebores (2004: 240), for instance, asserts that pay for performance is “in keeping with the outcry for accountability and, if properly applied, might be the only realistic approach to improving the quality of education.”

Those aggregate figures ought not obscure important distinctions among the three categories of texts. The foundational texts, including the widely assigned Jossey-Bass reader, are systematically critical of accountability. In those volumes, where accountability is mentioned just 21 times in 710 pages, 48% of mentions are critical, while just 23% are neutral and 29% positive. General texts discuss accountability in neutral terms about two-thirds of the time, but tend to be more critical than positive when editorializing. The specialized texts were the only volumes that were more positive than negative in discussing accountability, with 55% of discussion neutral, 28% positive, and 17% negative.

Ultimately, if principals are not being taught in a frank and realistic fashion what accountability systems entail and how they can be used to improve school performance, then where are they learning this? Unfortunately, the evidence suggests that principals may not be receiving the exposure, useful guidance, or balanced assessments of accountability that will prepare them for the evolving world of public education.

### **How do Texts Discuss Data?**

Data management and data-based decision-making are integral to effective school management in today’s world. Educational leadership experts have pointed out the



importance of data management in driving school improvement and student achievement. As Carolyn Kelley and Kent Peterson (2002: 256) point out, “new high-stakes tests and the detailed reporting of student scores require a more advanced notion of instructional leadership that involves complex analysis of data . . .”

Table 4 reveals the context in which each type of text discusses topics like data management and analysis. While data is not mentioned that often in any of the three types of books, it is generally mentioned positively and rarely mentioned negatively. This is rather intuitive, as it is difficult to denigrate the benefits of using data to evaluate programs, promote or remediate employees, or improve student instruction. The foundational texts lag behind the others in the frequency with which they mention data, and the specialized texts generally discuss data more often and more positively than the other two categories.

**[See Table 4]**

On the whole, the texts tend to be neutral or positive about the value of data collection and analysis for school leaders. In the 3,451 pages coded, “data” was mentioned about 16.8 times per 100 pages. The mentions were positive 50% of the time, neutral 48%, and negative just 2%. Clearly, the texts regarded data more warmly the concept of accountability. Moreover, the discussions of data were much more likely to include suggestions for effective use, with more than two-thirds of positive mentions and more than 30% of total mentions including such discussion.

While all three text categories treated data in positive terms, general texts and specialized texts were dramatically more likely than foundational texts to offer prescriptions regarding the collection and use of data. The Bagin and Gallagher (2001:

17) text on school and community relations highlights the importance of data in gaining an accurate picture of the school community: “age data should be broken down into convenient classifications and the implications carefully studied.” In contrast, ambivalence about the value of data on perspectives texts revolved around how it is used. According to the Jossey-Bass *Reader on Educational Leadership*, “Some people like to begin with the hard-and-fast data: academic achievement scores, attendance records, number of disciplinary actions, student surveys. We suggest that it is more important to return to your mission statement and core virtues, to reflect on where your school is and where it is heading as a community” (Ryan & Bohlin 2000: 335).

Among general texts, the presence of prescriptions is due entirely to the inclusion of the Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon text *SuperVision* (2003: 298). which routinely offers prescriptions such as, “Data-collection methods might include review of school records and student products, classroom observations, interviews and surveys.” Indeed, once *SuperVision* is removed from the general text sample, the general texts do not offer *any* prescriptions on how to use data, though they still discuss data in a generally positive light. The foundational texts are not only the least likely to discuss data at all, they are also the texts most likely to discuss data in a negative light (about 20% of mentions) and the least likely to offer suggestions for how leaders might find data useful.

### **How Do Texts Discuss Teacher Termination?**

We examined whether the most commonly assigned texts address tough-mined personnel management concepts like compensation and termination of employees. Though such topics are often deemed antithetical to school collegiality, principals are

under increasing demands to drive school improvement by increasing teacher quality. A recent Public Agenda survey of school administrators reveals that 78 percent of superintendents and 57 percent of principals believe that “principals are evaluated according to their ability to judge and improve teacher quality” (Farkas 2003: 21). An important task of human resources management in any sector is removing poor performers. Given the legal, procedural, and interpersonal difficulties that attend efforts to remove teachers, it would seem appropriate that preparation address how, why, and when to do so.

**[See Table 5]**

As mentioned earlier, teacher termination and dismissal are mentioned only 3.1 times per 100 pages of text. On the infrequent occasions when it is discussed, Table 5 shows the tenor of the analysis. Overall, the tenor tends to be neutral and professional. (Ninety-four percent of the discussion was either neutral or adopted a tone recognizing that termination could be necessary at times). An example from Rebore (2004: 197) illustrates a typical discussion of termination: “If the inappropriate behavior continues . . . the supervisor must continue with progressive discipline involving demotion, a pay cut, and finally, dismissal.” There were no mentions in which termination was ever depicted as a positive for the organization, while 6% of discussion suggested that termination should be regarded as an absolute last resort or avoided altogether.

In contrast, it is instructive to look at how termination is viewed in other sectors. As Jack Welch (2001: 158), the legendary CEO of General Electric, has argued, “Making these judgments is not easy, and they are not always precise...but...This is how great organizations are built. Year after year, differentiation raises the bar higher and higher

and increases the overall caliber of the organizationl.” While the Welch model is clearly not possible and perhaps inappropriate for a public school, it is worth noting that the management literature is replete with authors like Jim Collins and Peter Drucker who forthrightly discuss the importance of removing unproductive personnel. This perspective is utterly absent in these widely assigned principal preparation texts.

Overall, termination and dismissal receive remarkably little attention. Both the foundational and general texts reference dismissal less than once per 100 pages, while the concept’s relative prevalence among the specialized texts is due largely to the Rebores volume. Barely 5% of the attention devoted to termination in specialized texts is hostile, while the comparable figures are more than 15% in foundational texts and more than 10% in general texts. Michael Fullan (1996: 96), for example, sees the ability to “aggressively hire and fire” teachers as a negative force. He says this of schools that proactively manage human resources: “Infuriatingly, they are often held up by their systems as beacons of improvement which the rest, creamed of their best teachers, are expected to, but are frustratingly unable to follow.” Again, it’s worth noting that there is not a single positive mention of termination in any of the eleven texts studied.

### **How Do Texts Discuss Efficiency?**

Efficiency is another concept often considered alien to public schooling, though a variety of reformers have become increasingly vocal in recent years about demanding that schools should not only be held accountable for student achievement but also for the responsible and efficient allocation of resources. Recent scholarship has raised serious questions about the efficiency of resource utilization large urban districts (Ouchi 2003; Segal 2004). In turn, critics of standards-based accountability and licensure reform

routinely pillory radical reform advocates as trying to import a corporate approach to education because of their focus on forcing schools to use resources and people more efficiently (Sergiovanni 2000). Given these tensions, how do principal preparation texts treat efficiency? Table 6 illustrates that efficiency is generally treated in a neutral or positive light on the infrequent occasions when it is discussed at all.

**[See Table 6]**

Across all eleven texts studied, the term “efficiency” appeared 5.86 times per 100 pages. Efficiency is mentioned in a positive light about 38% of the time it is raised, neutrally 49% of the time, and negatively 13% of the time. As was true in the cases of accountability and data, few mentions offer prescriptions or suggestions for promoting efficiency.

The specialized texts are generally more positive about efficiency than are other texts, with nearly 50% of all references framed positively and fewer than 10% negatively. Bagin and Gallagher (2001: 47) call for “good planning” as a way “of determining where to go and how to get there in the most efficient and effective manner possible.” Both general and foundational texts were moderately positive, with 36% of mentions in foundational texts positive and 24% negative. When the foundational texts did reference efficiency negatively, they usually alluded to the fact that efficiency may be antithetical to teaching and learning. Fullan (1996: 18) argues, “There is also a sense in which teaching is deeply moral, irreducible to efficient techniques and learned behaviour.”

### **How Do Texts Discuss Resources?**

The subject of resources looms in debates over leadership. Some observers fret that principals are being asked to lead schools with insufficient resources, while others

have argued that schools have the resources they need to accomplish their mission and that principals are responsible for seeing that those resources are spent wisely. Table 7 shows that the topic of resources is discussed quite often and that most of the mentions are neutral or descriptive rather than making the case for more support.

**[See Table 7]**

On the whole, the availability of resources was mentioned 15.9 times per 100 text pages. Fifty-seven percent of these references were neutral, 26% focused on prescriptions regarding how to use resources wisely, and 15% of mentions asserted that schools have insufficient resources.

The specialized texts were particularly focused on providing guidance, with 38% of discussion focused on prescription and another 55% on neutral or descriptive discussion. Odden and Picus (2004: 50-51) offer the following evenhanded account of the school spending debate: “We side with those who conclude that the research suggests that there is a positive connection between resources and student achievement . . . But we also conclude that the money-results connections are not at all that strong, and we show in Chapter 10 that there are numerous ways to use money more effectively.” Specialized texts actually offer prescriptions for allocating resources more often than they do for data management, efficiency, or accountability.

Meanwhile, both the general texts and foundational texts were almost twice as likely to assert that schools lack necessary resources as to provide suggestions regarding the effective use of resources. Though such references occur only 2-3 times per 100 pages, when general and foundational texts do discuss the adequacy of resources, they invariably reflect the perspective that all schools are strapped for funding. For example,

if readers consult the index in Bolman and Deal's *Reframing Organizations* (2000: 479) to locate their discussion of "resources," they are redirected to "See Scarce resources." Rather than harping on what may or may not be an overarching lack of resources, it seems that foundational and general texts could do more to offer principals guidance on how to spend money more strategically.

### **Is There an Ideological Bias in the Texts?**

Conservative critics suggest that schools of education reflect a "left-leaning" or "progressive" bias that denigrates concepts like testing, accountability, and data and that places undue emphasis on concepts like culture and diversity. While it is not the central thrust of our analysis, we briefly examine the degree to which the implied bias is manifest in the texts studied.

#### **[See Table 8]**

In fact, a cursory analysis suggests that the themes more conventionally imagined to signal an explicit progressive bias are largely absent. The term "diversity" appears just 4.3 times and the term "multicultural" appears less than once per 100 pages. In general, values, culture, and diversity were relatively prominent in the foundational texts, but were noticeably less visible in the general texts and especially in the specialized texts.

There is little evidence that these texts demonstrated an effort to promote progressive notions of multiculturalism or diversity. Moreover, when these concepts did surface, the discussions were less normative or agenda-driven than some critiques might suggest. The Hoy and Miskel (2005: 356) text, for example, warns school leaders that "Given the growing diversity and other changes of school contexts (e.g. in economic wealth, ethnicity and gender in administrative positions, and with at-risk children), the

challenge of communicating accurately and clearly will surely increase.” Similarly, Bagin and Gallagher (2001: 156) assert that “Multiethnic diversity exists in most communities. . . . School administrators need to understand this and develop a communication plan.”

## **Conclusions**

The most widely used texts in a sample of 210 principal preparation syllabi focus on school culture and broad-brush discussions of student achievement, while devoting far less attention to the skills that enable managers to thrive in the accountable, increasingly flexible world of schooling. At the same time, countering the fears of the most vocal critics, there is no evidence that the texts are promoting an ideological agenda of multiculturalism or actively opposing test-based accountability.

The texts reflect the contemporary focus on school performance and outcomes rather than inputs and resources. On balance, the authors are broadly supportive of the managerial use of data, though they evince significant skepticism when it comes to using results to make tough decisions. There is concern that the texts devoted limited attention to issues like promoting efficiency or productivity, terminating poor performers, or using data.

Though far from perfect, the specialized texts do a reasonable job of walking readers through contemporary management challenges in areas like accountability or human resources. Texts by authors like Rebore or Odden and Picus offer concrete prescriptions on real-world problems that principals face. While it may be natural that foundational and general texts are less relevant to the daily workings of school management, they could do more to help aspiring principals confront uncomfortable



realities. For instance, general texts spend more than five times as much space bemoaning the lack of educational resources as they devote to discussing teacher termination. In general, there is a widespread reluctance to help principals treat seriously the need to improve faculty quality. In truth, even in the specialized texts, which generally exhibited a franker approach to personnel management, authors shied away from blunt discussion of why, when, or how principals might use evaluation to light a fire under teachers. For example, in their book on teacher evaluation, Danielson and McGreal (2000: 29) assert: “The first presumption, that of competence, states that unless notified to the contrary, the teacher’s [tenured] performance is at least at a satisfactory level. It conveys the notion that the job (and therefore the livelihood) of a teacher is never in question.”

Granted, there is much more to running a school than just efficiency, accountability, personnel management, and using data. Less tangible elements of successful enterprises, in business and elsewhere, are often equally important to organizational effectiveness. As Peterson and Deal (1999: 140) rightly point out about culture in business, “Clear goals, rational structures, high standards, and accountability are only part of why a business succeeds. The real lesson is how business leaders are able to . . . build a common spirit and cohesive culture.” Nonetheless, goals, structures, and accountability are useful tools, and it is unclear where aspiring principals will learn these if not in the course of their administrative training. The concern is that principals are not being sufficiently exposed to the full range of management practices necessary to thrive in contemporary schooling.

There are three ways in which preparation programs might more effectively acquaint aspiring principals with the demands of modern school leadership. One is for

authors of widely used texts to do a better a job of devoting more attention to issues like accountability, personnel management, and compensation and to discuss the elements of “tough-minded” management at greater length and in more depth. However, established authors will write what they wish, and it is not necessary or particularly likely that the authors will opt to make such changes. A second option is for publishing companies to make a concerted effort to exploit the existing market niche and publish and promote new texts that will provide alternative takes on key leadership questions. Of course, there’s no guarantee that such books will be adopted or assigned in preparation programs.

That brings us to the third, easiest, and probably most significant possibility, which is that faculty begin to alter the mix of content students are reading by taking steps to ensure that key management concepts are addressed and treated in a balanced, constructive fashion. As we’ve noted, specialized texts currently tend to do the best job of addressing hard truths in a useful fashion. However, increasing the use of specialized texts poses problems, since overview classes are an inevitable component of any preparation program and these courses tend to rely upon general and foundational texts. Moreover, these general classes constitute a candidate’s introduction to the field and can establish a tone that colors the subsequent course of studies. For these reasons, any effort to fundamentally alter the content of preparation must entail the utilization of overview texts that tackle these questions in nontraditional ways. Based on existing syllabi, it is not clear whether such texts are not widely assigned by faculty or do not currently exist.

Scholars of education administration have paid little attention to assessing the substance of the texts assigned to their students. More systematic inquiry of these texts

would ensure that students are being fully equipped for the demands of the modern principalship.

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Table 1: Texts Analyzed

Author/Editor	Title	Publisher	Year	Times Assigned	Text Type
Various Authors	<i>The Jossey-Bass Reader on Educational Leadership</i>	Jossey-Bass	2000	23	Foundational
Bolman, L and Deal, T	<i>Reframing Organizations</i>	Jossey-Bass	1997/2003	8	General
Glickman, C., Gordon, S., Ross-Gordon, J.	<i>Supervision and Instructional Leadership: A Developmental Approach</i>	Allyn and Bacon	2003	8	General
Bagin, D. & Gallagher, D.	<i>The School and Community Relations</i>	Allyn and Bacon	2001	6	Specialized
Rebore, R	<i>Human Resource Administration in Education: A Management Approach</i>	Allyn and Bacon	2001	6	Specialized
Odden, A. & Picus, L.	<i>School Finance: A Policy Perspective</i>	McGraw-Hill	2000	5	Specialized
Hoy, W. and Miskel, C	<i>Educational Administration: Theory, Research, and Practice</i>	McGraw-Hill	2005	5	General
Bransford, J., Brown, A., and Cocking, R. (eds)	<i>How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School</i>	National Academy Press	2000	4	General
Danielson, C and McGreal, T	<i>Teacher Evaluation to Enhance Professional Practice</i>	ASCD	2000	4	Specialized
Fullan, M	<i>The What's Worth Fighting For Series</i>	Teachers College Press	1996	4	Foundational
Peterson, K and Deal, T	<i>Shaping School Culture: The Heart of School Leadership</i>	Jossey-Bass	1999	4	Foundational



Table 2: Relative Frequency of Key Concepts (Frequency per 100 pages)

Key Terms	General Texts (frequency per 100 pages) N: 1,336 pages	Specialized Texts (frequency per 100 pages) N: 1,405 pages	Foundational Texts (frequency per 100 pages) N: 710 pages	Overall (frequency per 100 pages) N: 3,451 pages
Resources	14.59	19.94	9.15	15.90
Accountability	9.06	3.24	2.96	5.41
Data	16.09	23.66	4.23	16.82
Evaluation	27.10	63.31	6.20	37.87
Performance/ Achievement	52.17	45.72	26.76	44.34
Culture	30.84	4.83	73.80	28.77
Values	16.84	1.93	42.68	15.91
Compensation	4.27	33.45	0.99	15.70
Termination/ Dismissal	0.60	6.69	0.42	3.09
Efficiency	8.01	5.59	2.39	5.86

Table 3: The Context in Which Texts Discuss Accountability

Context of Accountability	General Texts (frequency per 100 pages) N: 1,336 pages	Specialized Texts (frequency per 100 pages) N: 1,405 pages	Foundational Texts (frequency per 100 pages) N: 710 pages	Overall (frequency per 100 pages) N: 3,451 pages
Positively; necessary component	1.42	0.83	0.85	1.06
Positively; explains how to implement	0.00	0.07	0.00	0.03
Neutral	5.69	1.79	0.70	3.06
Negative or skeptical	1.95	0.55	1.41	1.26

Table 4: The Context in Which Texts Discuss Data

Context of Data	General Texts (frequency per 100 pages) N: 1,336 pages	Specialized Texts (frequency per 100 pages) N: 1,405 pages	Foundational Texts (frequency per 100 pages) N: 710 pages	Overall (frequency per 100 pages) N: 3,451 pages
Useful in managing	2.10	4.07	1.41	2.77
Useful in managing; prescriptions offered	7.93 <sup>6</sup>	5.93	0.42	5.58
Neutral or descriptive	5.54	13.59	1.83	8.12
Marginally useful or useless	0.52	0.07	0.56	0.34

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<sup>6</sup> Note: all 106 instances of this category were in the *SuperVision* text.

Table 5: The Context in Which Texts Discuss Teacher Termination

Context of Termination/Dismissal	General Texts (frequency per 100 pages) N: 1,336 pages	Specialized Texts (frequency per 100 pages) N: 1,405 pages	Foundational Texts (frequency per 100 pages) N: 710 pages	Overall (frequency per 100 pages) N: 3,451 pages
Positive for Organization	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Necessary at times	0.37	3.52	0.42	1.69
Neutral	0.15	2.76	0.28	1.26
Use only as last resort, if ever	0.07	0.41	0.14	0.23

Table 6: The Context in Which Texts Discuss Efficiency

Context of Efficiency	General Texts (frequency per 100 pages) N: 1,336 pages	Specialized Texts (frequency per 100 pages) N: 1,405 pages	Foundational Texts (frequency per 100 pages) N: 710 pages	Overall (frequency per 100 pages) N: 3,451 pages
Mentioned positively	1.95	2.00	0.28	1.63
Mentioned positively; prescriptions offered	0.52	0.62	0.56	0.57
Neutral	4.34	2.48	0.99	2.89
Mentioned negatively	1.20	0.48	0.56	0.77

Table 7: The Context in Which Texts Discuss Resources

Context of Resources	General Texts (frequency per 100 pages) N: 1,336 pages	Specialized Texts (frequency per 100 pages) N: 1,405 pages	Foundational Texts (frequency per 100 pages) N: 710 pages	Overall (frequency per 100 pages) N: 3,451 pages
Referenced as low or never enough	3.44	1.31	2.54	2.37
Neutral	9.28	10.69	5.21	9.04
Prescriptions on allocation	1.87	7.45	1.41	4.09

Table 8: The Discussion of Diversity and Multiculturalism

“Politically Correct” Concepts	General Texts (frequency per 100 pages) N: 1,336 pages	Specialized Texts (frequency per 100 pages) N: 1405 pages	Foundational Texts (frequency per 100 pages) N: 710 pages	Overall (frequency per 100 pages) N: 3,451 pages
Diversity	4.49	1.10	10.42	4.29
Multicultural(ism)	0.25	0.34	1.27	0.49